DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 432 CS 510 511

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TITLE My Place in Time: Using Dialogue in the Exploration of Recollection and Implicit Knowing via Student-Directed Timelines.

PUB DATE 2000-11-15

NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Bowling Green, KY, November 15-17, 2000).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Audience Response; *Classroom Communication; *Cognitive Style; Instructional Innovation; Intermediate Grades; *Life Events; *Self Expression; Student Participation; *Student Projects

IDENTIFIERS Extemporaneous Speaking; *Reflecting (Communication); *Timelines

ABSTRACT

Observation of human behavior increasingly suggests there is a chasm between "what you do" (leadership, skill, behavior) and "what you know" (intellect, cognition, aptitude). To examine the gap between what is done and what is known regarding the teaching of children, a project first reviewed the literature on school-life activities that allows children to express knowledge, judgment, goal setting, decision-making, wisdom, and values. The literature was found lacking. Then 30 rising fifth and sixth graders at a rural elementary school used brightly colored washable markers and a 24" x 48" piece of white freezer paper to create a line to begin at any time in their past and end at any time in the future. They were asked to reflect on what had happened to them in their past, what was happening to them today, and what they envisioned would happen to them in their future, and to put it on paper. Personalization and embellishment were encouraged; spontaneous teams and joint efforts were not discouraged. After one hour, each student gave an extemporaneous presentation, followed by praise and applause from the audience. Findings suggest the students prioritized the relevance of events of their life chronologically, with potent examples of mature life experience emerging from their presentations. Students examined loss, suffering, and death as well as joy and victory in their lives, discussed leadership figures and loved ones, and presented meaningful plans for their future. Every child told his or her story, every child was praised and received the audience's applause. Children are filled with implicit and explicit information and utilize it at a younger age than is reflected in existing texts. Timelines served no diagnostic value in this exercise, but served to establish a dialogue between teachers and students leading to the emergence of critical literacy. (Author/NKA)

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My Place In Time: Using Dialogue in the Exploration of Recollection and Implicit Knowing via Student-Directed Timelines.

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For presentation at the
Mid-South Educational Research Association
2000 Annual Meeting Bowling Green, Kentucky
November 15, 2000

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Learning Styles 322

My Place In Time: Using Dialogue in the Exploration of Recollection and Implicit Knowing via Student-Directed Timelines. Douglas E. Masini, Doctoral Fellow in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

Introduction: The observation of human behavior increasingly suggests that there is a chasm between *what you do* (leadership, skill, behavior) and *what you know* (intellect, cognition, aptitude). To examine the gap between what we do and what we know regarding the teaching of children, I reviewed the literature on school-life activities that allow children to express knowledge, judgment, goal setting, decision-making, wisdom and values and found it lacking. Method: Thirty rising 5th and 6th graders at a rural elementary school used brightly colored washable markers and a 24" x 48" piece of white freezer paper to create a line to begin at any time in their past and end at any time in the future. I asked them to reflect on what had happened to them in their past, what was happening to them today, and what they envisioned would happen to them in their future, and put it on paper. Personalization and embellishment were encouraged; spontaneous teams and joint efforts were not discouraged. After one hour, each student gave an extemporaneous presentation, which was followed by praise and applause from the audience. Findings: Students prioritized the relevance of events of their life chronologically, with potent examples of mature life experience emerging from their presentations. Students examined loss, suffering, and death as well as joy and victory in their life, discussed leadership figures and loved ones, and excitedly presented meaningful plans for their future. Every child told their story, every child was praised and received the applause of the audience. Conclusion: Michael Polanyi (1966) said "...people know more than they can tell". Children are filled with implicit and explicit information and utilize it at a younger age than is reflected in existing texts. In this context, timelines allow children to express the 'separate realities' of their lives. Timelines served no diagnostic value in this exercise, but served to establish a dialogue between teachers and students leading to the emergence of critical literacy.

Introduction

I found myself frightened and alone among the children. The techniques I had learned in my training as an adult educator had been accompanied by a stern warning that the techniques were intended for use in the execution of adult learning experiences. I was asked to lead a learning experience on leadership with rising 5th and 6th graders, and toyed with the idea of deviating from the didacticism that was so prevalent in the elementary classrooms of my past and in those I had recently visited.

In an effort to establish communications with these children, I pondered the effectiveness of using Jane Vella's (1994) dialogue, where the perspective of modern childhood and the shared experiences and separate realities of childhood might emerge. I had also considered using the emancipatory classroom style that was so powerfully illustrated in Glenda Hull's (1993) example of students who learn through experience and dialogue to identify and overcome oppressive forces in their lives. I reflected on my own thoughts and plans for this experience; I felt like a person who is caught tearing the small white tags stating 'Do Not Remove Under Penalty Of Law' off of a new pillow. What would be the reaction of qualified teachers (of early childhood and K-12 students) to the blasphemy of adult-oriented learning and teaching techniques in a cohort of 11 and 12 year-olds? I decided that it was appropriate to use dialogue in a distinctly out-of-classroom experience with these children.

A Review of the Literature

Rudolf Dreikurs (1964) states that "Children are expert observers but make many mistakes in interpreting what they observe" (p. 15). The arguments of Dreikurs are highly controversial today, but part of this statement is irrefutable: Children are excellent observers. While their observations are limitless, their powers of interpretation and the way they define things comes in part from their own interpretation and in part from the expressed or implied interpretation of other children, their parents, guardians, siblings and friends. What children know and what they do are two different things, as nature and the environment they live in may contrast sharply with the nurturing relationship they have with others.

Children who are socially eloquent and actively involved in interactions with teachers, friends, siblings may learn different lessons or have different learning styles than those who are learning in a social void where they have few friends or acquaintances, a weak familial learning environment, and weak ties to friends, adults or teachers outside of the family. In both environments, conscious and unconscious learning continue to take place. One can frame these in the category of silent lessons, that is, we recognize that learning is taking place, but the substance of the lesson is not on the lesson plan.

Through silent lessons, the children learn to embrace interpretations that may be highly dissonant with the values of those around them, albeit these teachings may be more structurally sound, and morally and ethically superior to those of the parents, siblings, friends and teachers. The conceptual

framework of how and why this learning takes place is difficult to understand, but learning is taking place. Perhaps we should put aside the epistemic argument and adopt a strategy that addresses the content of what a child is learning through these lessons, both silent and spoken; perhaps we should listen.

When we listen to the ideas gained from their learning and hear their words, we learn about who the child is, where they are going, and what path they have chosen to follow. In this interaction the child is simultaneously learning from us. They learn that we care, that their words are worth hearing; and implicitly, they are able to forge new meanings around those unspoken, silent lessons.

Lessons drawn from explicit learning arise primarily from didactic lectures, textbooks, reading and calculation. Other lessons can be learned from storytelling, apprenticeship, observation, and implicit learning through vicariously reinforced experience. In both cases, silent lessons are being taught.

Turnbull's (1961) anthropological study of the BaMbuti pygmies demonstrated important psychological concepts relating to the human's ability to perceive the world around them, and suggested an inborn component affecting an individuals perceptual abilities. In this study, Kenge, a native tribesman who had lived all of his life in a lush jungle, was taken to the top of the mountain where he saw large buffalo at a distance and likened then to insects. When he was taken to the plain where the buffalo were grazing, he

spoke with trepidation and wonder at the strong magic of the researcher, who was able to turn the tiny insects into great beasts. Kenge had never been high on a mountain, and lacked the ability to perceive high from low or near from far. This lesson in perception and clarity should not be lost on the professional educator.

The measure of importance that an individual places on things may be influenced both by 'nature and nurture'. We learn lessons that are influenced by the environment (and those people and creatures who live in it) and by the intuitive and instinctive ways we learn to define things as big or small, near or far, bad or good, desirable or repulsive.

Schore's (1996, cited in Hock, 1999) contention is that an infant's early emotional experiences in relation to the primary caregiver actually influence the production of certain brain chemicals that play a role in the physical development of the cortex, the part of the brain that is responsible for our most sophisticated and complex functions such as thinking, perception and emotion.

Schore relates that "when the emotional attachment to the caregiver is unsatisfying, the hormones created in the infant's nervous system cause the abnormal development of specific structures and circuits in the cortex in the brain that are responsible for regulating emotional reactions. This abnormal brain development is triggered by negative environmental factors during the critical growth period of birth to two years of age, and creates an enduring increased susceptibility to various psychological disorders later in life" (Schore, 1996, cited in Hock, 1999, p. 17). Shore's work does not limit the

chronological start and stop points of this neuropsychological phenomenon, nor deny its occurrence in older children. Therefore, we can easily fit the teacher (especially in childhood development) into the role of one who can possibly impact on the brain chemicals and long term psychical health of the student in question. The effort of the teacher to listen to the child, to allow the child to tell their story, and cause the child to critically reflect on what they said seems both a functionally and pedagogically sound approach to teaching and learning.

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1990) conducted research on what children (and adults) need for optional functioning; they found that we function best when we have:

- autonomy (self-determination, the experience as oneself as the origin of decision rather than the victim of things outside of one's control, relatedness and competence).
- relatedness (a connection to others for belonging and love and affirmation).
- competence (pleasure from learning new things, acquiring skills and putting them to use (Deci and Ryan, 1990, cited in Kohn, 1996, p.9).

A child's teachers (along with friends, siblings and parents) are important providers not only of academic learning but also of the silent lessons, an important component of the overall life experience of the young student. The time-line exercise was intended to be evocative of past experience of students, with an opportunity for them to tell of their experience with color, drawings and words.

Method

This project was undertaken as a method of breaking the ice and establishing dialogue between the students, adult leaders and graduate education students. The activity, in theory, seemed an excellent way to get the children involved in a discussion on a subject upon which they were expert – themselves!

Thirty rising 5th and 6th graders were gathered at a rural elementary school in the gymnasium (an excellent strategic location for this activity). To assist the camp director, doctoral fellows and graduate students were asked to participate in a leadership activity in coordination with a university sponsored, grant-funded leadership camp. The researcher, serving as group leader, introduced the activity, and handed out brightly colored washable markers and a 24" x 48" piece of white freezer paper to each participant.

The children were instructed to create a line to begin at any time in the past, include the present and end at any time in the future. The activity leader asked them to think about events, people, family, friends, teachers or animals: anything that had happened to them in their past, what was happening to them today, and what they envisioned would happen to them in their future, draw a picture of it on paper and provide as accurate a date as possible for each event. Student's were told that they would present their work at the conclusion of the exercise, and the inclusion of examples of leadership were suggested, either in the past, present or future on the timeline.

Personalization and embellishment of the work was encouraged;

collaboration, spontaneous teams and joint efforts were noted, but not discouraged. An example of a time line was shown to participants and left out in clear view as a resource and reference for them, although creativity and deviation from the model was encouraged.

We utilized volunteer parents, teachers and education graduate students from a local university to act as guides throughout the experience, and they facilitated the logistics of keeping 70 colored markers flowing through the crowd of children, who were on hands and knees on the gymnasium floor in a large circle.

Findings

The majority of students had completed the project within 30 minutes to 45 minutes, but extra time was allotted to allow for completion. Interestingly, the majority of students who were finished returned to their work and continued working on it until time was called. After one hour, each student gave an extemporaneous presentation, which was followed by praise and applause from the audience. Students following the model prioritized the relevance of events of their life chronologically, with potent examples of mature life experience emerging from their presentations. There were deviations from the model, with students using drawings contained in boxes or diagrams to represent their timelines.

The students' drawings explored relationships with best friends and family, sharing vignettes on life in their isolated Central Appalachian mountain community. Many scenarios explored life in the single-parent family, the

impact of divorce and parental separation. The kids were candid in the descriptions of financial difficulty, the people who led them in their life, those who they loved and respected, the relationships with teachers, coaches, family members, siblings and parents, and the importance of love and spirituality in their lives. The students reflected with pride on their accomplishments; hobbies (such as baking, sewing, painting), mechanical skills, and woodcraft were annotated on the margins of the timelines. While most of the students described the death of a family member as a sad and important event, almost every student remembered the death of a significant pet (theirs or a pet in the family).

Students examined loss, suffering, and death as well as joy and victory in their life, discussed leadership figures and loved ones, and excitedly presented meaningful plans for their future. The extemporaneous presentations had to be time controlled as the more vociferous students presented every detail on their timeline. A presentation by a young man who said he was a 'future comedian' was exemplary of what we can learn from the students. With the activity leader holding the sheet of paper in clear view, (which the leader did for all presenters) the young gentleman had organized his timeline to explain his motivation for being a comedian, his life experience with comedy, how laughing helps people and he included a brief comedic skit. His homeroom teacher stated amazement; while he was a bright child, she had never seen him so animated or excited about a topic. In this activity, every child told their story, every child was praised and all received the applause of the audience.

Conclusion

Howard Gardner (1980), in his thought-provoking book *Artful Scribbles*, explores the significance of children's drawings and the method in which they execute these charming works of art. The intention of this exercise was to establish dialogue with children, allowing them to share cognition of their place in time, and for adults who were not trained as teachers to learn from these students. Michael Polanyi (1966) said "...people know more than they can tell". In this activity, the students shared a side of themselves that is not often seen by adults. The researcher believes that children are filled with implicit and explicit information and utilize it at a younger age than is reflected in existing texts. In this context, timelines allow children to express the 'separate realities' of their lives. Timelines served no diagnostic value in this exercise, but did serve to establish a dialogue between the adults, teachers and students that lead to the emergence of critical literacy.

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